Wait for Spring

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Wait for Spring

by BumblebeesAndDandelions

Summary

After quitting his job at the FBI and moving, Will has finally settled into himself, and found a quiet kind of peace, until a stranger, wearing a torn prisoner's jumpsuit and a stolen guards jacket, shows up at his door.

Notes

June 25 - | Natural Disaster | Stranded |

If I missed a tag, please let me know!

Hours away from any city or town, tucked deep in the woods, there was a cabin. In that cabin lived seven dogs and their oft-maligned owner.

Being in the woods was good for Will, quieted his mind. There was no one for his empathy to latch on to, and he felt like himself, deeply and truly, for the first time in a very, very long time.

He'd had to quit his job with the FBI two years ago, after his encephalitis drove him to his breaking point. Even Jack's demands and Alana's sickly sweet reassurances couldn't convince him to stay- he had been done breaking himself against the endless stream of cases and murderers. So he left. Packed up his dogs and his life and never looked back. It was colder here in the winters, and sometimes they'd be snowed in to the point of not being able to leave the house for days, but it was quiet here. There was no one to knock on his door demanding he turn his empathy towards another dead body, no one to look at him askance, suspicious and demeaning, while he solved cases for them.

He almost hadn't known what to do with himself, without the leash Jack had kept him on. Life was slower, without his heels being whipped for results. He took apart his car last winter, built it back again piece by piece. The stream by his house fed into a lake, a couple miles past his house, and he caught fish with the lures he made. He wrote a couple more papers, if only to prove to himself in some way that he could still do that, still understand the field he'd dedicated himself to, even if he didn't ever intend to return to it.

The dogs adored the change. He was home more, they had more space to roam, although the wilder woods meant he needed to keep a closer eye on them. He left only to buy more supplies, groceries mostly, from the nearest town's store, nearly an hour away. Buster enjoyed the snow, even if he got lost in the bigger drifts.

It was what he had needed to heal. He just wasn't sure what to do now that he was healed. He wouldn't ever go back, but he also wasn't certain he'd be content fading from memory in these woods. No one would notice, except maybe in passing frustration that he couldn't be used to solve a case, or Freddie wondering where that profiler she'd enjoyed maligning had gotten off to. He'd wanted more, once, then to just disappear. He wasn't sure what he wanted now. Next season, maybe, he'd figure it out. Spring was all about new beginnings, after all.

Fall was fast passing, and the first winter storms were on the horizon. Will was taking apart his car again in his shed, having already gone for enough groceries to last at least a couple months. The engine wasn't running right, and he'd rather figure out the problem now then have it fail in the event of an emergency.

Snow had been falling for the past ten minutes, and would likely continue for the rest of the week at least. His father would call this storm a killer, if he were still alive.

He looked up when the dogs started barking. They didn't bark at wildlife, he'd trained them out of it, which meant someone was here. He left his tools where they were, and grabbed his shotgun off the wall of the shed, before going around to the front of the house.

There, in the front yard, surrounded by his pack of dogs, was a man in a jumpsuit and a dark jacket, watching his dogs with mild amusement. He was clearly injured, favoring a leg stained dark with dried blood, and shivering from the low temperature.

Fuck, Will thought. He recognized that jumpsuit. The prison it came from was nearly an hour away by driving, which meant this guy had traveled far. Which meant, in turn, that in addition to being a criminal, he was likely hungry, and desperate.

“Hey! Don’t go near my dogs, asshole,” Will called out, leveling the shotgun at the man as he whistled sharply for his dogs. Obediently, they all ran to the unlocked back door and inside the house, away from the man.

The man looked at him, taking in the gun. He looked… annoyed, at Will, likely for calling him an asshole, but only for a moment, before his face smoothed into a cordial smile. Any pain he felt from his leg injury was kept off his face.

“Hello, I’m afraid I’ve become quite lost, would you mind offering some assistance?”

“Sure. Prisons about thirty miles East, back the way you came.” Will gestured lightly with his gun, refusing to humor the man. He was clearly dangerous, and Will didn’t intend to get involved with that. The wind had turned up, howling through the trees, and he would have to lock his windows and doors soon if he wanted any chance of keeping the heat in against this storm.

“Do you often find yourself host to escaped inmates? That would be quite the terrible track record for dear Chilton if so, he is so anxious regarding his safety measures.”

“”I’m not a host to anyone, I’m not hosting you. You’re on my property, and I’d advise getting off of it.” Looking at him, the first person outside of the tiny town he got groceries he’d seen in months, his empathy practically kicked into overdrive, compelling him to add, “it’d be awfully rude of you to trespass.”

The man smiled again, barely a twitch of his lips, like Will had told an unexpected joke. He appeared to consider something for a moment, reassessing. Hopefully, Will thought, he would just turn around and go back the way he came, and I can eat dinner in peace tonight. Wishful thinking.

“I’d rather be pointed towards town, if it’s all the same to you. The weather seems to be worsening at a rate that suggests I would not make it back to the prison, even if I were inclined to return.”

Will was already shaking his head, sneering. He didn’t particularly care for anyone in that town, but wasn’t going to send a likely murderer their way just to have some peace.

“Fuck no. They don’t deserve whatever you are. Also, that town is the same distance away as the prison, just in a different direction.”

The snow was buffeting them now, whipping the man’s jacket enough that he had to cling to it. This man wouldn’t make it to town before the worst of the storm hit, if he tried, he’d be

dead from exposure and frost before he even left Will's property.

"Then I'm afraid I find myself rather out of options. Unless I happen upon a Good Samaritan willing to shelter me through this storm." The man gave a pointed look at Will, who barked out a laugh. The man thought he was an idiot, great.

"Fuck. No. I'm not letting a murderer around my dogs."

"You do appear to have a habit of collecting strays, surely, as ragged as I am at this moment, I count? And I assure you, I do not harm animals." The first part was said to convince, the last with conviction. A promise, whether or not Will let the man in. This man found hurting animals distasteful, incredibly so, which made Will, despite himself, soften slightly. Fuck.

He'd killed before, in self defense. In a failed attempt to save a teenage girl's life, once. Because he hadn't seen another option, more than once. Technically, technically, turning this man out into the cold wouldn't even be killing him, not directly. He could find a cave, or something, to weather the storm itself. This didn't have to be his problem, he told himself. It didn't work.

He glared at the man anyway, hoping he'd just give up and leave before Will broke. He didn't, just stayed there, hands spread in supplication. He was dangerous and probably some sort of insane, and Will was tired of killers and cops and doing the right thing just one more time. Fuck it. Worst case, he knew from experience he could handle one man in a fight.

"Just- fuck. You even look at one of my dogs wrong, even fucking breath wrong in their direction, and you're gone, understand?"

He lowered the gun slightly, watching the man. Snow was falling around them in earnest now, enough that it was almost difficult to see the man, despite being barely twenty feet apart.

"Of course. My name is Hannibal, and yours…?"

"Will. The storm will only get worse, and you probably need a shower if you've come as far as the prison. And bandages, for your leg. It isn't broken, right?"

"Thank you, Will, for your hospitality. I am indebted to you. My leg is not broken, merely shot."

Traveling that far on an injured leg, Will thought, was impressive, even if it wasn't broken. He hoped Hannibal didn't expect him to actually help with that, his knowledge of first aid not directed at his dogs consisted mainly of drowning the pain in alcohol and pushing through.

Will allowed Hannibal inside, ignoring the animal instincts that screamed he was letting a predator into his home, and showed him the shower, setting out a towel and change of clothes for the man before leaving to finish preparing his house for the coming storm. Firewood had already been collected, but he had to cover the windows in blankets, set the fireplace.

Hannibal could stay in the guest room until… the storm passed? Until spring time? Until they killed each other? Until he left, Will ended the train of thought.

Hannibal seemed reserved and polite, at least. He thanked Will for the clothes and shower and bed, took the offered sewing kit and rubbing alcohol for his leg, and turned in quickly as the remaining light was snuffed out by the storm that had arrived in force. He'd be lucky to have power in the morning, at this rate. Will fell asleep surrounded by his dogs, thoughts turning unbidden to the man in the next room.

It seemed he wouldn't have to wait for spring for that change in life after all. He hoped, at least, that Hannibal would be interesting.

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